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CHAPTER IV

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

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THE DRAGALEVTSY of 1937 had much in common with the Dragalevtsy of the past centuries. The dances, the homes, and the farm practices proved that. The differences were also marked. For instance, a crude but efficient means of population control in the good old days was the killing off of the old people when they had passed the period of active usefulness. That at least was the theme of an old folk tale still current in the village. "It so happened that one spring the people discovered that they had saved no grain for sowing. The king sent men everywhere in search of grain, only to see them return empty-handed. One son, who at considerable risk to himself had kept his aged father alive, secretly hidden in his home, told him of the people's distress. The old man said: 'Tell the people to go to the ant hills for grain.' Some of the men followed this suggestion and found the grain they were hunting. When the king learned that an old man had told them where to look he ordered that the aged should not be killed for their disability but should be kept alive and respected for their wisdom."

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Just at what time this story became a part of the folklore was difficult to determine, because of the numerous racial mixtures which the people represent. The Pechenegi, according to all accounts, might have been the ones who practiced this parricide. They got themselves into the history books by driving the Magyars (the modern Hungarians) westward from what is now Russia in the latter part of the ninth century. For about two hundred years more they, allied first with one prince and then with another, raided tribe after tribe and lurked near important trade routes. In 1091 the Pechenegi who had survived previous setbacks were finally destroyed by the Crusaders under Peter the Hermit, and little was heard of them after that.

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forms of the religion; and usually the prevailing religion has a monopoly in its field. Where there once existed two or three competing religions, the peasants now have a syncretistic set of beliefs that almost all of the people accept.

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The population in a familistic society tends to be stable. The folk legends and religious beliefs stress the importance of remaining at home. Permanence becomes a virtue, for travel outside introduces too much novelty. Separation places a strain upon the family relationships, which must be kept at full vigor in the interest of community self-preservation.

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Recreation is personalized instead of being commercialized. Peasants, as far as possible, spend their leisure hours in the company of others, to say nothing of the many hours women spend working with each other within a family or neighborhood circle. Just as the villagers have ceremonial ways of doing many things, they also have formal ways, or proverbs, of saying many things. This we saw earlier in the description of the *Sedenki.* Proverbs reinforce those beliefs that help maintain the familistic society, and serve as convenient means of self-expression. At the same time they are standards of behavior.

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Because recreation and economic life are personal, the familistic society has little need for much reading and writing. The priest, the middlemen, the taxgatherers, and a few others who early associated themselves with the village economy needed to "figure," but the rest of the people had little concern with that.

In most family-dominated societies, life is man-centered. In some areas this arrangement is related to religious beliefs; in others, it is related to the economic organization of the family in which somebody has to give orders necessary to the carrying out of the daily activities. A recognized head, conscious of his own importance, acts authoritatively in directing his family group.

The local government is traditionally managed by elders, who represent families rather than political parties or individuals. The village elders make their decisions from the standpoint of what is good for the village as a whole in the light of precedents rather than from a narrow legalism. The religious writings or sacred legends are conveniently cited to justify the actions they take. Such govern-